

MEYER MALTING GRAIN ELEVATOR
(Schaefer Brewing Grain Elevator)
1314 Niagara Street
Buffalo
Erie County
New York

HAER No NY-259

HAER
NY
15-BUE
40-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
U.S. Department of The Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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HAER No. NY-259

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Location: 1314 Niagara St., Buffalo, Erie County, New York

Date: Building permit approved May 20, 1914

Designer: H. R. Wait

Builder: Monarch Engineering

Status: Derelict

Significance: The grain elevators of Buffalo comprise the most outstanding collection of extant grain elevators in the United States, and collectively represent the variety of construction materials, building forms, and technological innovations that revolutionized the handling of grain in this country.

Project Information: The documentation of Buffalo's grain elevators was prepared by the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), National Park Service, in 1990 and 1991. The project was co-sponsored by the Industrial Heritage Committee, Inc., of Buffalo, Lorraine Pierro, President, with the cooperation of The Pillsbury Company, Mark Norton, Plant Manager, Walter Dutka, Senior Mechanical Engineer, and with the valuable assistance of Henry Baxter, Henry Wollenberg, and Jerry Malloy. The HAER documentation was prepared under the supervision of Robert Kapsch, Chief, HABS/HAER, and Eric DeLony, Chief and Principal Architect, HAER. The project was managed by Robbyn Jackson, Architect, HAER, and the team consisted of: Craig Strong, Supervising Architect; Todd Croteau, Christopher Payne, Patricia Reese, architects; Thomas Leary, Supervising Historian; John Healey, and Elizabeth Sholes, historians. Large-format photography was done by Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.

Historians: Thomas E. Leary, John R. Healey, Elizabeth C. Sholes, 1990-1991

This is one in a series of HAER reports for the Buffalo Grain Elevator Project. HAER No. NY-239, "Buffalo Grain Elevators," contains an overview history of the elevators. The following elevators have separate reports:

NY-240 Great Northern Elevator
NY-241 Standard Elevator
NY-242 Wollenberg Grain & Seed Elevator
NY-243 Concrete-Central Elevator
NY-244 Washburn Crosby Elevator
NY-245 Connecting Terminal Elevator
NY-246 Spencer Kellogg Elevator
NY-247 Cooperative Grange League Federation
NY-248 Electric Elevator
NY-249 American Elevator
NY-250 Perot Elevator
NY-251 Lake & Rail Elevator
NY-252 Marine "A" Elevator
NY-253 Superior Elevator
NY-254 Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator
NY-256 Urban Elevator
NY-257 H-O Oats Elevator
NY-258 Kreiner Malting Elevator
NY-259 Meyer Malting Elevator
NY-260 Eastern States Elevator

In addition, the Appendix of HAER No. NY-239 contains brief notations on the following elevators:

Buffalo Cereal Elevator
Cloverleaf Milling Co. Elevator
Dakota Elevator
Dellwood Elevator
Great Eastern Elevator
Iron Elevator
John Kam Malting Elevator
Monarch Elevator
Pratt Foods Elevator
Ralston Purina Elevator
Riverside Malting Elevator

The Meyer Malting Complex lies close to the Erie Canal and is the only twentieth-century Buffalo facility located near this waterway. The building permit was issued in May of 1913. The elevator provides an early example of the work of H. R. Wait of the Monarch Engineering Company.¹

The elevator has a capacity of 500,000 bushels in its fourteen cylindrical bins, eight interspace bins and fourteen outerspace bins. The cylindrical main bins appear to be spread in one direction only, although Wait's later work is characterized by bins spread in both directions. This arrangement finds physical expression in the exterior appearance of the structure; on the two elevations of the building where the outerspaces are enlarged by the separation between the adjoining main bins, the exterior walls of the outerspaces are of conventional convex form. On the remaining two elevations, where the outerspace bin size is relatively small, the capacity is maximized by the use of straight exterior walling. The structural details of the bins are not known.

The elevator features the first concrete workhouse constructed in Buffalo. It is not known whether it was constructed by slip forming. For practical or economic reasons, Wait employed conventional structural steel techniques in the headworks of all his subsequent elevators.

BUSINESS HISTORY

George Meyer Malt & Grain was the dean of Buffalo malting houses. In the 1950s it was the largest maltster east of Chicago, surpassing even the redoubtable Perot Malting operations located on the Buffalo River. The company began at the end of the nineteenth-century. It was founded by George J. Meyer who had learned his trade working with another Buffalo company, Curtiss Malting Company.

As with Perot Malting, Meyer Malting was far from the Midwest barley fields but very near the eastern markets. George J. Meyer, the founder, established what would become a huge operation in 1909 on Buffalo's far west side. The land for the malting operation ran north to south along Niagara Street on the east side and the Niagara River on the west. Although the river was still navigable at this point, along Buffalo's upper west side, the real attraction to Meyer was the New York Central's main line that ran down the center of the site, coming out of Toronto and connecting with Detroit. The projected malt house could be served by rail bringing in raw barley and shipping out

finished malt. The river provided the bonus of barge traffic to do the same.²

Meyer Malting began construction of the existing plant and alterations to the wooden elevator already on site in January of 1909. In March and April, Meyer filed for permits to construct a reinforced concrete malt bin and a four-story brick malt house. Four years later, the company finally added a reinforced concrete elevator with a brick and concrete warehouse and flour mill joining the complex in 1920.³

In 1919 Meyer died, and his family members, both sons and in-laws, incorporated the company and assumed control. The company's purpose as recorded in the certificate of incorporation was simple: to manufacture, sell, and deal in malt and by-products, to trade and manufacture cereals, and to buy and sell flour and other grains and cereals. In addition it would provide elevating, storage, and milling facilities. The original incorporators of the reorganized company included four members of the immediate Meyer family and M. M. Frauenheim, a Meyer son-in-law. The sixth director was Edward L. Jellinek, a prominent Buffalo lawyer.⁴

Over the next three decades, the plant expanded on a regular basis so that, by the early 1950s, the property covered two city blocks north and south and two blocks east and west, spanning the New York Central track and reaching the Niagara River. The company had three malt houses, a substantial elevating facility, and numerous subsidiary operations including the flour mill, a laboratory, and support buildings.⁵

Meyer made a huge addition to its malting operations in 1954 when it purchased the forty-year-old Spencer Kellogg linseed oil elevating and mill site. Now operating under the in-laws name of Frauenheim, the Meyer Malting Company had been transshipping barley from other elevators on the waterfront; the Kellogg Elevator allowed the maltsters to add a huge, water-based shipping and processing plant to its holdings. It was especially critical at this time since the western half of the Niagara Street plant was to be demolished by the New York State Thruway Authority. Furthermore, the Kellogg site gave both Meyer plants access to the Great Lakes shipping which could reduce the overall cost of barley.⁶

The owners of Meyer Malting were George and Edward Frauenheim, George Meyer's grandsons. Together the two men, president and vice-president respectively, planned to invest substantial capital in a dramatic innovation designed to entirely alter the methods of malt production. The existing process

involved moving barley, saturated slurries of sprouting grain, and dried malt from place to place. The Frauenheims proposed building a tower 60' in diameter and 240' high that would draw barley from the top down by gravity. Edward Frauenheim designed the process and the glass and steel tower. The company invested \$250,000 in a 25' high scale model that could produce four different types of malt.⁷

The proposed tower was a potential solution to the company's loss of the western half of its plant to thruway construction. In advance of that property consolidation, Meyer Malting also sold the southeastern portion of its operation to the Catholic church. Because the restriction on its property could be compensated for by building the gravity-fed malt tower up, rather than out, the loss of land was not initially seen as a detriment to the company's operations.⁸

The tower was never built, however, and just one year after the pilot program was announced in December of 1960, Meyer Malting operations were sold. The next December, Schaefer Brewing purchased both the original Niagara Street malting plant and the Spencer Kellogg plant that Meyer had operated for just over seven years. Schaefer had the waterfront facility until 1985; it sold the Niagara Street malt house to Stroh Brewery in 1987. Stroh immediately re-sold the plant to "1314 Niagara Street, Inc.," an amorphous corporation established by the Frauenheims who, apparently, hoped to re-enter the malting industry. Today the property is abandoned, up for back taxes, and listed for sale. It is growing increasingly derelict, and its future is uncertain.⁹

ENDNOTES

1. The following paragraphs are based on information from city permits, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps and personal conversations with Henry Baxter and Ed Hennessey. Contemporary trade journals carry Monarch Engineering advertisements featuring this elevator.

2. Buffalo Courier-Express, 18 January 1953, Sec. 7, p. 8.

3. Erie County Clerk (ECC), Corporations, George Meyer Malt & Grain Corporation, Certificate of Incorporation, August 6, 1919, Box 6620; Buffalo Courier-Express, 18 January 1953, Sec. 7, p. 8. All Erie County Clerk documents are listed by date of document origin, not by date of filing, unless otherwise noted.

4. Buffalo City Hall, Permits and Plans, Permit #RO48905, January 5, 1909, Permit #28305, March 12, 1909, Permit #28559, April 14, 1909, Permit #39095, May 20, 1913, Permit #60510, March 10, 1920.

5. Buffalo Courier-Express, 18 January 1953, Sec. 7, p. 8; Buffalo City Hall, Permits and Plans, Permit #53201, June 28, 1954, Permit #51595, February 14, 1954.

6. Buffalo and Erie County Public Library (BECPL), Scrapbooks, "Industry," Vol. 8, p. 102; ECC, Deeds, Liber 6326, April 8, 1954, 287-88.

7. BECPL, Scrapbooks, "Industry," Vol. 8, pp. 156-57.

8. ECC, Corporations, George Myer Malt & Grain Corp., Consent to Sell, June 11, 1952, Box 6620. This agreement refers to deeds Liber 3739, p. 340; 3802, p. 418; 4327, pp. 529, 532; 4353, pp. 472, 476.

9. ECC, Deeds. Liber 6727, December 15, 1961, p. 377, Liber 9809, December 30, 1987, pp. 450, 454, 458.

SOURCES

Buffalo Courier-Express, 18 January 1953, Sec. 7, p. 8.

Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, scrapbooks, "Industry,"
Vol. 8, p. 102.

Building Permits and Plans, 301 Buffalo City Hall.

- #28305 (March 12, 1909)
- #28559 (April 14, 1909)
- #39095 (May 20, 1913)
- #60510 (March 10, 1920)
- #53201 (June 28, 1954)
- #51595 (February 14, 1954)

Erie County Clerk, Records, Erie County, NY.

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps.

APPENDIX

Bins: Capacity 500,000 bushels
Flat exterior walling
14 main bins; 8 interspace bins; 14 outerspace
bins

Workhouse: Possibly the earliest concrete workhouse in
Buffalo

REFERENCES: City permits provide the date. Contemporary trade
journals carried Monarch Engineering advertisements featuring
this elevator.